

National Institute of Corrections (NIC)

IMPACT OF TRAUMA

Justice-involved women have high rates of identified mental health problems, substance abuse disorders, interpersonal trauma, and specific trauma-related conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Correctional policy and practice have historically been developed with male offenders in mind, and minimal recognition has been given to the risk (often informed by needs) of women. Women's pathways into criminal justice often include histories of abuse. This impacts how they serve time, and creates challenges to re-entry and to their success under community supervision. Behavioral disruptions in women's prison facilities are most likely to involve disturbed female inmates with histories of trauma, mental illness and substance abuse. Additionally, parental stress and challenges to housing safety contribute to failure under community supervision (Van Voorhis et al, 2008). Additional statistics on women in the justice system, information about the impact of trauma on justice-involved women, and sources for further information can be found in the first Federal Partners Report on Women and Trauma <http://nicic.gov/Library/025082>.

How a Trauma-Informed Approach Can Make a Difference

In 1974, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) was created by legislative action as a direct result of the riots at the Attica Prison in New York in which thirty-nine correctional staff, inmates and civilians were killed. NIC's mission is to provide innovation and leadership in advancing effective correctional practice and policy to jails, prisons and community corrections across the country.

Over the years, NIC has developed research-informed products and initiatives that address the risk, needs and strengths of women in our nation's jails, prisons and on community supervision. Drawn from research internal and external to criminal justice, NIC has incorporated information addressing women's physical and behavioral health issues; patterns of dependence and addiction; sexual, physical and interpersonal violence experiences; relationships and relational theory; parenting and childcare responsibilities; and the financial impact of poverty. The implementation of trauma-informed policies and practices will assist correctional systems to meet safety and security needs as well as assisting in systems improvement and risk reduction, to include decreased recidivism of justice-involved women.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (DOJ)

Major Accomplishments 2010-2013

NIC funded a project addressing secondary (vicarious) trauma in non-clinical correctional professionals. Exposure to difficult and often dangerous working conditions and troubled populations takes a toll on correctional staff, with rates of PTSD exceeding other first responders. Materials to be released in FY13 include a white paper, resource guide, and content for a series of webinars and a webpage.

An E-Learning training has been developed specific to working with women offenders. One module is on trauma and trauma-informed practices with women, and another on building individual and organizational resilience among staff working with this population.

Additionally, NIC has provided numerous training and technical assistance events to jails, prisons and community corrections on managing the risk and needs presented by justice involved women, for whom trauma is often an underlying issue.

A document was developed entitled Pregnancy and Child Related Legal and Policy Issues Concerning Justice Involved Women, highlighting the impact of trauma on justice involved women.

As a response to the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA), NIC funded through a cooperative agreement a project to validate a measurement instrument for use in improving safety in women's correctional facilities and to provide a template for data-driven decisions to enhance safety.

A two-part satellite broadcast focused on justice involved women's health was aired in 2012-2013, with over 5500 registered viewers. Topics included the prevalence of trauma in justice-involved women and behavioral and reproductive health issues. Both broadcasts are available through the NIC website.

New Directions and Collaborations

NIC is partnering with a broad group of Federal, state and local partners to address the use of restraints with pregnant women in institutional settings.

NIC will be developing a training curriculum and materials based to assist agencies in improving safety in women's institutions. This work will build upon the PREA work noted above.

NIC is developing a dedicated website on trauma and trauma-informed practices for addressing the needs of justice-involved women.

Additional Resources

Update contact: mbuell@bop.gov

www.nicic.gov/womenoffenders

<http://www.bop.gov/about/co/nic.jsp>

Van Voorhis, P. et al (2008) Achieving accurate pictures of risk and identifying gender responsive needs: Two new assessments for women offenders. Washington, DC: NIC.